

# Biden doubles US emissions cut target as summit lifts climate hopes

April 22 2021, by Shaun Tandon

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US President Joe Biden speaks during climate change virtual summit from the East Room of the White House

President Joe Biden on Thursday doubled US ambitions on slashing greenhouse gas emissions, leading Japan and Canada at a summit in

making new commitments that bring the world closer to limiting the worst climate change.

Putting the United States back at the forefront on [climate](#), Biden told a virtual Earth Day summit that the world's largest economy will cut emissions blamed for climate change by 50 to 52 percent by 2030 compared with 2005 levels.

"The cost of inaction keeps mounting. The United States isn't waiting," Biden told a two-day summit of 40 leaders including the presidents of rivals China and Russia.

"We have to step up," Biden said. "We have to take action—all of us."

Biden's early and aggressive environmental push marks a drastic shift from his predecessor Donald Trump—but quickly raised questions on whether the United States can keep promises if another climate-skeptic president is elected in the future.

John Kerry, the former secretary of state who has become Biden's globe-trotting climate envoy, said that with the new pledges, more than half the world's economy has committed to action to keep the planet's temperature within 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times, the aspiration set in the Paris Agreement to avoid the most severe effects of climate change.



A polar bear stands on melting sea ice in Svalbard, Norway, in 2013

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who discussed climate last week when he was Biden's first foreign guest, significantly raised the goals of the world's second largest developed economy to cutting emissions by 46 percent in 2030 compared with 2013.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, another early ally of Biden, boosted ambitions of his energy-exporting country to reductions of 40-45 percent below 2005 levels, compared with an earlier target of 30 percent.

"We must take action now. Because there's no vaccine against a polluted

planet," Trudeau said.

## 'Game-changer'

The European Union this week confirmed its own ambitious goals and former bloc member Britain on the eve of Biden's summit released the most far-reaching targets of any major economy with 78 percent cuts from 1990 levels by 2035.



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson addresses a virtual US-led summit on climate

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called Biden's pledge "a game-changer" that will "have a transformative impact in the global fight against climate change."

Britain in November will host a UN conference in Glasgow that aims to upgrade the Paris Agreement.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres hailed the pledges made at the summit as a turning point but urged immediate action.

"Today's summit shows the tide is turning for climate action, but there is still a long way to go," Guterres said in a statement.

Under the 2015 Paris accord, former president Barack Obama said the United States would cut emissions by 26 to 28 percent by 2025—a goal that Biden, his vice president, has now dramatically scaled up.

But Greta Thunberg, the emblematic 18-year-old climate champion, accused politicians of still ignoring the climate crisis as she pointed to continued subsidies for fossil fuels.



US climate envoy John Kerry speaks with Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen in Dhaka in April 2021

"How long do you honestly believe people in power like you will get away with it?" she told an Earth Day hearing in the US Congress by videolink.

In a smellier way of showing discontent, climate militants rolled pink wheelbarrows to the White House to dump cow manure as they described Biden's plan with a choice epithet.

## **Onus on China**

The White House's stately East Room was decked out with a patch of moss for the virtual summit, with Biden, Kerry and much of the US leadership taking part virtually with counterparts.

In a brief glitch, Secretary of State Antony Blinken cut off a pre-recorded video from French President Emmanuel Macron to hear from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who appeared to be impatient to make his live remarks.

Both Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke of commitments to climate change, agreeing to participate despite high tensions with Biden's three-month-old administration.



Xi Jinping promised last year that China would go carbon neutral by 2060 but environmentalists note one of the biggest challenges is to reduce coal

Xi reiterated his pledge that China—by far the world's largest emitter—would reach carbon neutral by 2060.

"China has committed to move from carbon peak to carbon neutrality in a much shorter time span than what might take many developed countries, and that requires extraordinarily hard efforts from China," Xi said.

He said China would "strictly control" coal-powered plants.

But environmentalists have voiced alarm at the lack of immediate action to curb coal, which is the dirtiest form of energy but politically sensitive due to mining jobs.

## **Moving quickly**

Faced with opposition from Trump's Republican Party, Biden has sought to move quickly on climate and has cast his efforts as a way to create well-paying jobs.

Biden has proposed a \$2 trillion infrastructure package that includes a major focus on greening the economy, including investment in renewable energy, electric cars and public transportation.





Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, US President Joe Biden and others are seen on a screen during a climate change virtual summit at the White House



The United States is still largely on track to meet Obama's goals thanks to commitments by states, especially California, and a drop in industrial production

Biden also announced that the United States would double its climate aid to poor nations compared with Obama's time—another reversal from Trump, who cut off all such funding.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in announced that his nation would no longer fund coal-powered plants overseas after backing, along with Japan and China, billions of dollars in such dirty projects in Asia.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, one of Trump's few international allies on climate, sounded a conciliatory note as he promised his nation would reach carbon neutrality by 2050—10 years earlier than previously announced.

He also promised to stop illegal deforestation by 2030—a vital measure, as the Amazon sucks up carbon, but one that has been met with skepticism due to Bolsonaro's alliance with industry.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India—which is the third largest emitter, but far lower than the West on a per capita basis—made no new pledges but promised a new "partnership" with Biden to mobilize green investment and urged a greater "lifestyle change" to fight [climate change](#).

A UN report late last year said that the world was on course for warming of three degrees Celsius—a level at which the planet is forecast to see many glaciers and ice caps melt, low-lying areas submerged and increasingly severe droughts, floods and disasters that could trigger famine and mass migration.

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